MARJORIE LIU

SANA TAKEDA

image

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MONSTRESS

THE STORY SO FAR...

In Ravenna, secrets were laid bare. The Warlord of the Dawn Court learned the truth about her niece, Maika Halfwolf, and the real power that destroyed Constantine. Maika learned the truth about her oldest and dearest friend, Tuya, and her high position in the rival Dusk Court. And Maika's grandmother, the Wolf Queen, confronted her old enemy, Zinn – the Monstrum that lives inside Maika. But when the human army, assisted by Yvette Lo Lim, fired gas extracted from Monstrum remains into Ravenna, all hell broke loose. Civilian Arcanics fell into cannibalistic insanity, while the Ancient Wolf Queen was driven to a mad power surge that threatened the lives of everyone in the city.

Maika and Zinn fought the Wolf Queen to the best of their ability, but they soon realized that they could only truly win the battle, and save their friends, by using the fragments of the Shaman-Empress's mask to merge into one singular being. The powerful fusion was enough to defeat the Wolf Queen, and in the fragile aftermath, the transformed Maika pulled Tuya into a long-awaited kiss.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

TUYA: Maika's closest friend in the world, who has been with her since before the Battle of Constantine. Unbeknownst to Maika, she is also the Baroness of the Last Dusk, a high-level member of the Arcanic Dusk Court tasked with containing — or even destroying — Maika's power.

WARLORD: The Dawn Court's "Sword of the East," twin sister of Moriko Halfwolf, and Maika's aunt. Ruthless in her ambition, the Warlord's greatest desire is to unravel the mystery behind the destruction of Constantine. She believes the secrets of Constantine will protect the Arcanics in their impending war against the humans — but she does not realize that the answers she seeks lie within her young niece.

THE QUEEN OF WOLVES: Mother of Moriko and the Warlord, grandmother of Maika, and leader of the Dawn Court. The Wolf Queen is one of the most powerful Ancients, and she holds equally powerful secrets.

We made a vow, Tuya... Do you remember?

It was right after the war.

WE MUST FLEE!

UBASTI CURSE YOU! THESE ARE THE ONLY COPIES LEFT OF THE JAGUA CODEX! WE HAVE TO SAVE THEM!

That who we were before - how we were raised, what we were taught - none of that should matter.

Surviving had remade us. It was a chance to be new.

I never told you why I wanted that so badly. And you never told me.

HURRY! I HEARD THERE'S STILL SHIPS OUTSIDE RAVENNA!

You called it... "The beautiful dream."

Too bad we gave up on dreams.

THIS IS MADNESS!

WE'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO TAKE OFF WITH ALL THESE PEOPLE! THEY'LL TEAR THESE VESSELS APART!

YOU HAVE TO STOP THEM FROM BOARDING!

A LITTLE LATE FOR THAT.

THIS SHIP IS DESIGNED TO CARRY TROOPS! IT CAN HANDLE THE --

GODDESS, SAVE US.

MIN... MAKE SPACE FOR THE WOLF QUEEN.

AND SEE TO THE WARLORD. SHE'S BEEN INJURED.

DON'T... GO... FAR...

TRY AND CATCH ME, AUNTIE.

...NO...NOT CATCH...

...NEED HELP...NEED... YOU...

...NOW... RIGHT NOW...

WIFE, CALM YOURSELF.

I THINK SHE'S PRETTY FUCKING CALM.

I'M NOT ABANDONING YOU.

BUT YOU'LL PROBABLY REGRET HAVING ME AROUND.

ISN'T THAT RIGHT, BARONESS?

COME, LET'S TAKE THIS ELSEWHERE. NO ONE WILL BOARD WITH US STANDING HERE.

GOOD.

THEY *SHOULD* BE WARY.

HMMM.

I LOVE CHAOS, DON'T YOU?

IT MAKES IT SO EASY TO SLIP INTO PLACES UNNOTICED.

HELLO, YVETTE.

SUCH A STRIKING CHANGE IN APPEARANCE, MAIKA.

THE MASKS, YES? YOU USED THEM TO TRANSFORM YOURSELF? I CAN HEAR THEM... SINGING.

IF YOU WOULD ONLY LET ME TOUCH THEM --

SHUT UP.

I SUSPECTED YOU'D BE NEARBY.

MY FATHER IS THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD HAVE WEAPONIZED THE BLOOD AND FLESH OF AN OLD GOD.

WHO ELSE WOULD HE SEND TO CONVINCE THE FEDERATION TO USE IT?

I HEAR THE EFFECT IS QUITE... DRAMATIC.

IT'S FUCKING AWFUL.

HE STARTED THIS WAR WHEN HE BOMBED AURUM...AND NOW HE'S HELPING KILL ARCANICS.

YOU WISH TO KNOW WHY?

YOU SAID IT YOURSELF. CHAOS MAKES IT EASY TO SLIP INTO PLACES UNNOTICED. HE'S BREAKING THE WORLD, SO THAT HE CAN TAKE POWER.

OF COURSE. BUT IT'S FOR *YOUR* BENEFIT, AS WELL.

TO CONTROL ME?

AND *PROTECT* YOU.

YOU ARE A WALKING IRONY, MAIKA HALFWOLF.

PERHAPS THE MOST DANGEROUS CREATURE IN THIS WORLD. AND YET, THE MOST VULNERABLE.

YOUR ENEMIES ARE ENDLESS.

YOU'RE ONE OF THEM.

AM I?

IS HE?

THOSE ARE THE FEDERATION SHIPS WE DETECTED BEFORE THE RADIOS WENT DEAD.

NOT FEDERATION, MAIKA.

THEN WHO --

OH, FUCK ME.

SOMEONE -- FIND LADY LO LIM. I WANT TO KNOW WHAT WAS IN THOSE CANNISTERS WE SHOT INTO RAVENNA.

SOMETHING UNNATURAL HAPPENED IN THAT CITY.

ER... LADY LO LIM IS GONE. SHE WAS LAST SEEN RUNNING TOWARD RAVENNA, ACCOMPANIED BY --

COLONEL, WE FINALLY HAVE VISUALS ON THE AIRSHIPS!

AND?!

THEY'RE NOT OURS! BUT THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE DEMON SHIPS, EITHER! WE'VE NEVER SEEN THIS DESIGN BEFORE!

POWER THE CANNON! PREPARE TO FIRE!

WAIT... SOMETHING IS WRONG --

BOOM!

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WE'RE UNDER ATTACK! TAKE COVER!

SISTER ZORTIA! WHERE ARE YOU?!

AAIIEEE!!

DID YOU SEE THEM BOMBARD THE FOREST?!

THEY MUST HAVE KILLED ALL THE HUMANS!

BURN THEM! BURN THEM!

HAHAHA. YES, BURN THE HUMANS. BURN THEM ALL.

BY THE GRACE OF THE BLOOD AND THE LIGHT!

PERMISSION TO BOARD! WE HAVE FOOD AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES!

ARE THOSE PEOPLE ALL THAT'S LEFT OF RAVENNA, SENTENUS? DID SO MANY TRULY DIE?

WE COULD HAVE COME SOONER.

AGREED. THE PLAN WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN AFFECTED.

YES, IT WOULD HAVE.

RID YOURSELVES OF REGRET, WAR-MASTERS. OTHERWISE WE'LL NEVER PREVAIL.

SO, YOU'RE THE SAVIORS NOW?!

WHAT A FUCKING JOKE!

YOU'RE THE JOKE, HALFWOLF! YOU AND YOUR INCOMPETENT AUNT!

YOU SHOULD BE GUTTED! ALL THAT POWER, AND RAVENNA WAS LOST UNDER *YOUR* WATCH, NOT OURS!

THE BLOOD IS WASTED ON YOU!

TELL ME SOMETHING I DON'T KNOW!

WE FIGHT WITH THE WEAPONS WE HAVE!

AND SOMETIMES NEITHER *WE* NOR OUR *WEAPONS* ARE GOOD ENOUGH!

BUT IF YOU GET LUCKY, YOU GET ANOTHER CHANCE TO FIGHT.

AND I'M A LUCKY WOLF.

THE BLOOD IS LIGHT.

THE BLOOD IS LIFE.

I HOPE THE SAME IS TRUE FOR YOU, WAR-MASTERS.

IF YOU'VE BENT THE KNEE TO THE OLD MAN... YOU'RE GOING TO NEED EVERY SCRAP OF LUCK YOU CAN GET. HE THINKS OF YOU ALL AS SLAVES TO HIS PLANS... NOT AS PEOPLE.

WE'RE NOT SLAVES, HALFWOLF... WE'RE LOYAL.

LET ME KNOW THE DAY YOU DISOBEY HIM.

AND THEN I'LL CALL YOU FREE.

CHILD... BEWARE... HER BLOOD...

...A FAMILAR SCENT...

I KNOW THE OTHER WAR-MASTERS... BUT NOT YOU.

I AM THE *BEAST.*

AND I WILL SEE YOU IN THE NORTH, HALFWOLF. WE HAVE AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE DUSK COURT... TO DISCUSS WHO WILL LEAD THE WAR EFFORT.

GOOD.

WE'LL BE ABLE TO COMPARE GIFTS FROM THE OLD MAN.

WHAT A REFRESHING YOUNG KILLER.

I REALLY DO NEED TO CONVINCE HER TO BE MY SWORD-NOVICE.

DAMN HER!

KRRRAK!

AURUM.

YOU *MUST* REST, MOST HOLY MOTHER! WHATEVER HAPPENED CLEARLY WEAKENED YOU!

WE CANNOT AFFORD TO HAVE YOU ILL. NOT NOW! YOU ARE THE HEART OF THE FEDERATION --

GET AWAY FROM ME...

...OR I WILL EAT YOUR SOUL.

SHE'LL EAT MORE THAN THAT.

THIS IS INTOLERABLE. WHY DOES IT PAIN US SO WHEN THE HALFWOLF USES THOSE MASKS?

SURELY YOU HAVE SOME INSIGHT, HAVING WORN THEM YOURSELF?

I'VE SHARED MY INSIGHTS, REMEMBER? NO ONE CARED.

STOP ACTING LIKE A HURT FOOL.

THIS IS IMPORTANT. WE DIDN'T KNOW WHEN *YOU* USED THEM. WE HAD NO IDEA UNTIL YOU RETURNED AND TOLD US.

WHY IS IT DIFFERENT FOR --

BOOM!

AH, IF IT'S NOT MY OLD TEST SUBJECT.

IT'S THE FATHER!

FEED! FEED NOW! WE NEED STRENGTH!

URK!

CALM YOURSELF --

HOW EASY IT IS TO EXPOSE YOUR KIND.

=GASP=

YOU WEAR YOUR POWER SO POORLY.

LOOK UPON THEM! YOU ARE LED BY DEMONS!

SWEET MARIUM!

BLAM!

BLAM!

BLAM!

OUR MOTHER SUPERIOR HAS BEEN POSSESSED!

AIIEEE!

SHHLUKK!

I SHOULD THANK YOU.

THE BLOOD I COLLECTED FROM YOU MADE ALL THIS POSSIBLE.

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CHOOM!

I APPLAUD YOUR EFFORTS TO FEED OFF ME.

BUT DESPITE ALL APPEARANCES, YOU AND I SHARE ONE THING IN COMMON.

WE ARE *GODS.*

I JUST HAPPEN TO BE THE SUPERIOR ONE.

TSK, TSK. SO MUCH VIOLENCE.

AND FOR WHAT? SOMETHING THAT WE BOTH KNOW DOESN'T *REALLY* BELONG TO YOU?

HUMAN.

YOU HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF ARROGANCE.

INDEED, LORD DOCTOR. AS DO YOU.

WHO ARE YOU?

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

KRAK

NNGH!

VIHN.

HOW DID I NOT SEE YOU THROUGH YOUR ILLUSION?

I KNEW WE WOULD MEET AGAIN. HERE, IN FACT. YOU WOULDN'T HAVE SENT ANYONE ELSE TO FETCH THIS MASK FRAGMENT.

AND SO I MADE SOME... ADJUSTMENTS TO MYSELF.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME, LORD DOCTOR, IS THAT YOU BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE BRILLIANT.

I, HOWEVER, PREPARE AS IF I AM NOT.

SVASH!

KRASH!

THAP

YOU'VE ENHANCED YOUR STRENGTH AS WELL, VIHN.

THE CORPSE OF THE OLD GOD THAT FELL IN PONTUS? YOU MADE A SERUM FROM ITS BONES?

THE BLOOD FOX CAN'T BE THE ONLY ONE TO BENEFIT FROM HIS DISCOVERIES.

NNGH!

YOU FOOL! THOSE ROADS ARE GONE... FOR A REASON. THE SAME REASON THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS HAD TO DIE.

YOU CANNOT USE THE MASK. BUT I CAN. MY DAUGHTER CAN.

I AM DOING THIS FOR US ALL. THE ANCIENTS, THE OLD GODS, ALL THE CREATURES WHO FLED TO THIS WORLD FOR REFUGE.

DO YOU NOT WISH TO RETURN TO THE STARS?

THIS IS WHY YOU CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO REASSEMBLE THE MASK.

IN THIS, I THINK THE OLD GODS AND THE ANCIENTS WOULD AGREE.

SHE WAS TOO CURIOUS, AND DID NOT RESPECT THE DANGERS OF WHAT WE ESCAPED FROM.

NEITHER DO YOU. YOU CANNOT RECKON THOSE HORRORS.

BUT I CAN. I HAVE SEEN ZINN'S MEMORIES.

AND I AM NOT AFRAID.

DO WE ALL WANT THE MASK? OF COURSE. BUT ONLY SO THAT WE MIGHT LIVE MORE COMFORTABLY ON *THIS* WORLD.

INDEED. YOU BOTH PREFER YOUR PRISONS TO A LIFE OF FREEDOM.

YES, WE CHOOSE A SOFT DEATH OVER A HARD LIFE.

HAPPILY.

THIS IS NOT THE DAY YOU PLANNED FOR, LORD DOCTOR.

YES, YOU SURPRISED ME. I SUPPOSE ONE DAY I WILL THANK YOU FOR THAT.

NO, YOU WON'T.

I TOLD YOU.

GODDESS, THAT FEELS STRANGE.

LIKE I'M LOSING PART OF MYSELF.

... EVEN I... FEEL COLD...

... BUT EVEN... MORE PECULIAR...

... I AM NOT... AS HUNGRY...

WAS IT LIKE THIS WITH YOU AND THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS? WHEN SHE WORE THE MASK?

... WE DID NOT... TAKE... THIS FORM...

... WE DID NOT... MERGE...

... WE COULD NOT...

... BUT I THINK... YOU ARE... PART OF ME... AND I AM... YOU...

... AND THAT... IS THE DIFFERENCE...

WE'VE NEVER SPOKEN ABOUT THAT, HAVE WE? NOT DIRECTLY.

YOU HAD A CHILD WITH THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS. SOMEHOW... SHE MADE THAT POSSIBLE.

...THE CHILD... YES...

...SHE WAS...SHE WAS... MINE...

THAT CHILD IS MY ANCESTOR.

AND YOU ARE MY...

...MY...

FAMILY, MISS.

MISTER ZINN IS FAMILY.

LIFE IS VERY STRANGE, ISN'T IT?

...STRANGER... THAN I... COULD HAVE DREAMED...

GO LOOK AFTER CORVIN. THAT IDIOT CAN BARELY STAND.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

TO CHECK ON THE WOLF QUEEN.

BE CAREFUL, MISS.

AS SOON AS YOU START LISTENING.

NEVER.

NEVER.

I THOUGHT WE'D KILLED HER, FOR SURE.

...HER KIND... ARE DIFFICULT... TO EXTERMINATE...

WHILE SHE... REGENERATES... SHE WILL BE... AS IF DEAD...

ZINN... WHEN WE KILLED THE BLOOD FOX ON THE ISLE OF BONES... I ONLY STRANGLED HIM.

... INDEED...

DID HE SURVIVE THAT?

... UNDOUBTEDLY...

BUT THE FERRYMAN, REN... THEY ALL SAID HE WAS DEAD. EVEN VIHN.

... THE TRICKSTER LIED... AND THE FERRYMAN AND REN... WOULD NOT KNOW... BETTER...

YOU DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING!

... YOU DID NOT... ASK...

... I AM NOT... RESPONSIBLE... FOR CORRECTING... YOUR LACK OF... EDUCATION...

FUCK. ARE ALL THE ANCIENTS AS POWERFUL AS THE WOLF QUEEN?

... YES...

... THEY ARE... FORMIDABLE FOES...

THEY COULD CRUSH THE HUMANS, ZINN. THE WOLF QUEEN, BY HERSELF, COULD WIN THIS WAR.

THEN WHO WOULD THEY RULE? WHO WOULD AMUSE THEM?

Not so long ago, I was still wishing I'd never left you.

Another life, Tuya. Another dream.

PRIVACY.

...AS YOU WISH...

You and I were told so many lies.

Lies about who we had to become, and who we had to fear.

...BUT HAVE CAUTION...

How different things would have been if we'd stopped listening.

If we'd focused instead on what we had right in front of us...each other?

But I know how impossible that would have been.

More impossible than anything that's happened since.

YOU COULD HAVE JUST SAID YOU WANTED TO KILL ME. ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.

I WOULDN'T HAVE MINDED. I MIGHT HAVE HELPED YOU.

Who I am now... could not have been born any other way... except through leaving you.

BUT YOU WAITED TOO LONG. NOW I WANT TO LIVE.

I HAVE... THINGS TO DO.

I was rotting inside, Tuya.

I was a rot. A poison.

YOU'VE CHANGED.

YOU'VE CHANGED SO MUCH YOU'RE NEW TO ME.

And now I'm something else.

MAKES YOU UNCOMFORTABLE, DOESN'T IT?

IT WAS EASIER TO BETRAY ME WHEN I WAS CRUEL. EASIER TO BETRAY ME WHEN YOU REMEMBERED MY CRUELTY.

I don't know what that is yet, Tuya.

I'm not good.

NO, IT DIDN'T MAKE IT EASIER.

YOUR CRUELTY WAS JUST PAIN. I KNEW THAT. BUT IT MADE ME ANGRY.

WHY COULDN'T YOU JUST FUCKING HEAL, MAIKA? WHY COULDN'T YOU SWALLOW YOUR PAIN LIKE THE REST OF US HAD TO?

IF YOU'D JUST *CONTROLLED* YOURSELF --

But maybe...just maybe...I might be good for something.

IF I PRETENDED, YOU MEAN.

PRETENDED TO BE HAPPY. PRETENDED TO BE SAFE.

PRETENDED NOT TO BE FURIOUS AND TERRIFIED AND CONFUSED.

One day I hope to understand what that is.

IS THAT WHAT IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN, TUYA? TO KEEP YOU FROM KILLING ME?

BECAUSE PRETENDING WOULD HAVE KILLED ME ANYWAY.

Will you be there when I do?

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=SNORT=

REALLY, TUYA? YOU HAD TO FUCK MY AUNT?

SHUT UP.

WHAT?

FFFT!

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TUYA.

I COULDN'T BE SURE CORVIN HADN'T WARNED YOU ABOUT THE SERUM AND HOW IT WAS ADMINISTERED.

SO I HAD SOMETHING DIFFERENT CRAFTED. JUST AS EFFECTIVE.

SHHUK!

...BETRAYAL!...

GYAHH!

TU...YA...

IT'S JUST YOUR MIND, MAIKA.

IT'S LIKE GOING TO SLEEP.

YOU WON'T FEEL ANYTHING WE DO TO YOU.

IF IT MAKES IT EASIER, I WON'T HARM THE FOX CHILD.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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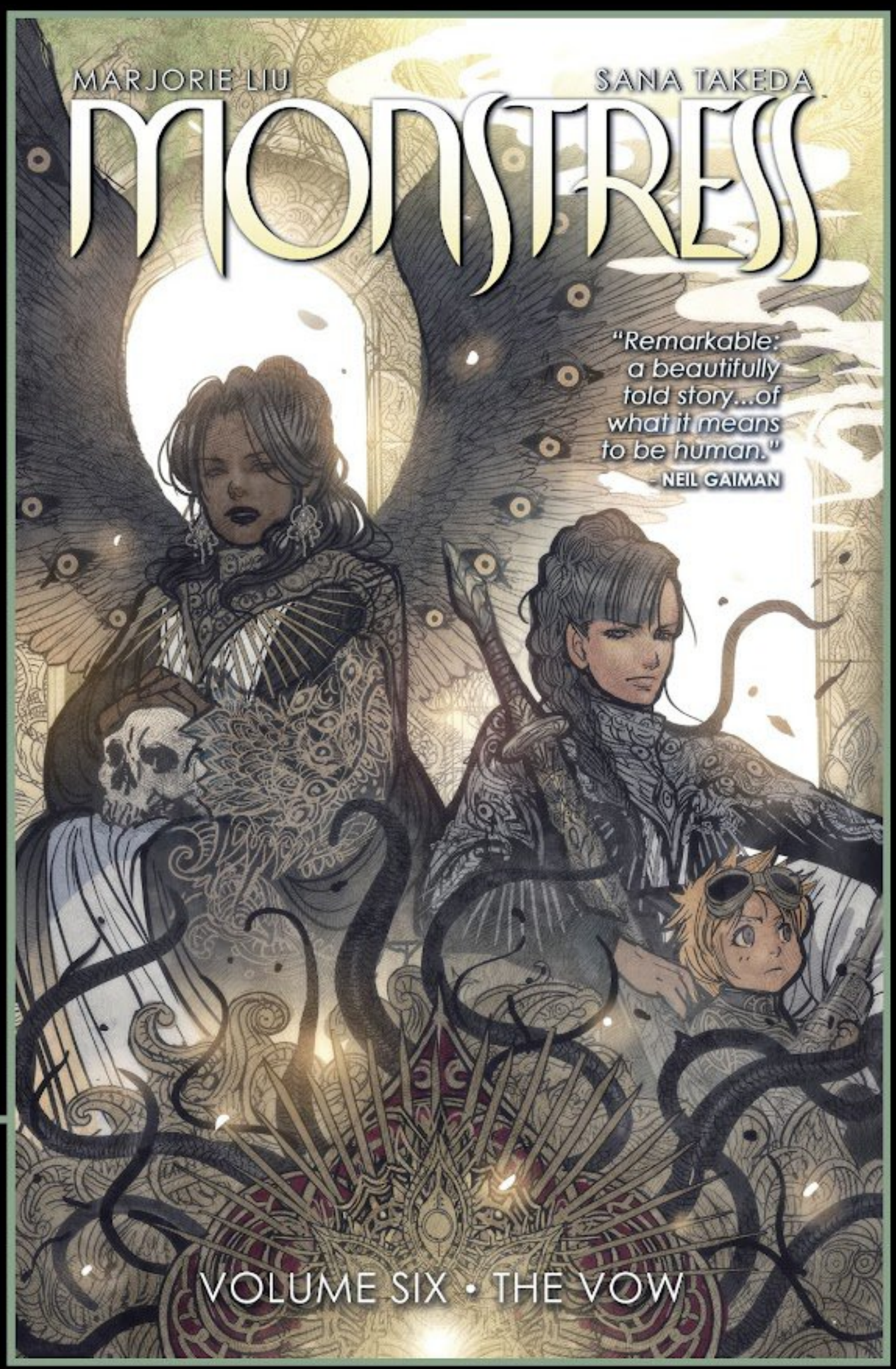
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